

Christians Coping With Grief

A Workbook for Finding God's Truth in a Time of Sorrow!



by
Rev. Don Allen, Jr. PhD

Dedication

*To my parents, Donald (Gene) and Freda Allen, for their
caring hearts, and unconditional love.*

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All the assignments in *Christians Coping With Grief* are designed to help you personally address the issues of grief that you are facing. Please take time to read all of the scripture verses and complete all of the assignments. As a result, you will be better able to cope with each day.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Building Healthy Relationships For Coping With Grief | 3 |
| Understanding Definitions..... | 6 |
| Beginning the Process of Coping..... | 7 |
| Developing Coping Skills for Grief..... | 8 |
| Analyzing Biblical Examples of Coping With Grief..... | 11 |
| Identifying Your Personal Loss..... | 14 |
| Reviewing Past Losses..... | 17 |
| Identifying the Five Stages of Grief..... | 19 |
| Developing Skills for Working Through Grief..... | 23 |
| What Do I Do Now?..... | 24 |
| Using Listening Skills..... | 27 |
| Identifying Symptoms of Complicated Grief..... | 31 |
| Using a Daily Feelings Journal..... | 32 |

Appendices

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| A List of Feeling Words..... | 33 |
| B God's Emergency Phone Numbers..... | 34 |
| C Seeking Professional Help..... | 35 |

Introduction

Isaiah 53:4 (NKJV)
Surely He (Jesus) has borne our grief, and carried
our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and
afflicted.

Welcome to the process of developing skills to cope with ***grief*** in your personal life. Because you are reading *Christians Coping With Grief*, you must have an emotional need to address a personal loss in your life or you must know someone who has suffered a personal loss. By using this workbook, you will develop an understanding of the comfort that Jesus Christ can provide as you develop skills for coping with difficult losses and emptiness.

Often when we address the issues of grief in our personal lives, we struggle to complete the process. Unresolved grief results in a personal search for something to take away the constant pain. Some individuals turn to drugs and/or alcohol as an “escape” from the pain. Some people develop unhealthy relationships to attempt to forget or dull the pain. Still others deny the pain and internalize their feelings, which may then lead to depression and other emotional and/or mental illnesses.

Grief and ***bereavement*** are both a natural part of life that occurs following the ***loss*** of a significant person, such as a spouse, a family member, or a close friend, a pet, an object, or a job/career either through death or a loss of some kind (such as a divorce, a separation, or

physical relocation). In the grieving process, individuals basically attempt to adjust to the loss as best as possible; they often struggle to develop coping skills to deal with the loss.

As Christians, we have been taught that with prayer all things are possible. And, as pastors, counselors, family members, and others who are suffering from personal loss, this is a Biblical promise that we want to hold on to. However, this is not often as easy as it sounds. In order for us to appropriately address grief and allow prayer to begin the healing process in our life, we must develop a strong ***belief*** that God can and will do a work in our life, as we are willing to face the issues in our own heart and mind.

As you proceed through *Christians Coping With Grief*, I recommend that you share your feelings, discoveries, and concerns with a pastor, a Christian counselor, or a trusted, mature friend who can help you process information, encourage you, and pray with you as you grow emotionally and spiritually through your loss.

Building Healthy Relationships For Coping With Grief

Let's look at a word that is key to our survival: ***relationship***. The Bible addresses five different types of relationships: (1) acquaintances, (2) common associates, (3) close friends, (4) intimate relationships, and (5) personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Each of these relationships can provide support during the grieving process. And, a critical goal throughout the grieving process is to strengthen these relationships especially with close friends, intimate friends, and with Jesus Christ for an improved support system for your future.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NKJV)
Two are better than one,
because they have a good reward for their labor.

1. Acquaintance - Individuals with whom you come into contact who have no real knowledge of or interest in your personal issues or concerns.

Examples: Gas station attendant, store clerk, some neighbors, some people at work, and even some individuals at church

Name three people you know that you can classify as an acquaintance.

- a.
- b.
- c.

- 2. *Common Associate*** - Individuals with whom you have some regular communication and together you share some basic concerns.

Examples: Co-workers, children's teachers, some neighbors, clubs or groups to which you belong, and some members of your local church

Name three people you know that you can classify as a common associate.

a.

b.

c.

- 3. *Close Friend*** - Individuals with whom you are willing to spend time and confide in, and they in return confide in you.

Examples: (a) Best friends - It has been stated that if a man has five best friends in his lifetime, he can count himself lucky. These individuals may be within your own church community; they share the same convictions, beliefs, and faith in a personal loving God.

(b) Pastor - Your pastor provides spiritual support and will also become a part of your emotional and mental health support.

Name three people you know that you can classify as a close friend.

a.

b.

c.

- 4. *Intimate Relationship*** - Individuals to whom you are deeply committed; those with whom you will share the deepest and most intimate part of your life.

These are not one-night stand, or weekend trip relationships.

Examples: Spouse; your children

Name three people that you can classify as an intimate relationship.

a.

b.

c.

5. *Personal relationship (called agape love) with*

Jesus Christ - His love is perfect, peaceful, and always present. And, His love is manifested in our actions to others.

In the space provided below, share how your personal relationship with Jesus Christ can help you through this time of struggle and loss.

Understanding Definitions

To address your personal grief, you must understand these basic terms:

Crisis - "A crisis is a sudden upsetting event-- sometimes foreseen, often not anticipated. It is an event that strikes people in a vulnerable place at an inopportune time. The English word is based on the Greek term '*krinein*', which means, 'to decide.' Crises are life-changing events in part, because decisions must be made that nearly always alter the course of life."¹

Grief - "A strongly unpleasant emotional state associated with loss or deprivation and often accompanied by sobbing or weeping."²

"The cognitive (thinking) and emotional (feelings) process of working through a significant loss."³

Grieving - "Grieving following a loss is to the emotional system what healing is to the physical system after surgery. Just as an operation traumatizes the body, a loss jolts the emotional system, producing disruption and upheaval. While grieving is painful, it is to be viewed as a healthy response, for without it a complete emotional recovery is not possible."⁴

¹ *Soul-Care Bible*, American Association of Christian Counselors, Thomas Nelson Publishing, Inc. 2001, p.1194

² J. P. Chaplain, Ph.D., *Dictionary of Psychology*, Dell Publishing, New York, 1985, p.199.

³ *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, Baker Books, Michigan, 1999, p.519.

⁴ *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, Baker Books, Michigan, 1999, p.519.

Mourning - "The actions or feelings of someone who mourns; specifically, the expression of grief at someone's death."⁵

⁵ Helen Fitzgerald, *The Mourning Handbook*, Fireside, New York, 1994, p30.

Beginning the Process of Coping

Read Psalm 23. Then, answer the following questions. Take as much time as you need to reflect on the small still voice that is speaking to your heart and mind.

- 1.** Who do you personally identify as your shepherd?
- 2.** Are you personally willing to let Him help you walk through this valley? Why or why not?
- 3.** What comfort do you receive from this passage during your time of grief?

Developing Coping Skills for Grief

Each of the scripture references listed on this page can provide comfort during your time of grief or loss. *Read each verse and determine how you can apply each one to your personal life.*

1. Joshua 1:1-9

➤ *My personal application*

2. Psalm 77:1-15

➤ *My personal application*

3. Jeremiah 31:12-13

➤ *My personal application*

4. *Matthew 5:4*

- *My personal application*

5. *John 14:1-6*

- My personal application

6. *John 16:16-22*

- *My personal application*

7. *Romans 14:8*

- *My personal application*

8. *I Thessalonians 4:13-18*

➤ *My personal application*

The first mention of grief found in the Bible is in *Genesis 6*. Ironically, this scripture does not address death, but instead deals with the loss of a relationship (that is, God's relationship with mankind). God was grieved (verse 6) over the behaviors of man, his attitude, and his turning away from God. Today, you may be addressing a loss of some kind in your life; perhaps the loss is not a death, but rather relocation to another city or a change in jobs.

The story in *Genesis 6* is compelling because just a few chapters earlier we find Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of good and evil. Then we read the story of Cain killing Abel. Not once is grieve mentioned in this chapter.

The very fabric of *Genesis 6: 6* shares that God grieves with us. He (God) shares in our pain and our separation from Him, and He prepares a plan to survive the situation. In *Genesis 6*, God prepared the "Ark" for Noah and his family to survive the flood. He has a prepared a *giant ark* to help *you* through your grief situation today. That giant ark is His loving arms surrounding us every moment.

Analyzing Biblical Examples of Coping With Grief

In *II Corinthians*, the Apostle Paul shares two verses regarding God's message to him while he struggled with his personal grief and affliction:

II Corinthians 12: 9-10

*And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

*I will rather boast in my infirmities,
that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities,
in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses,
for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am
strong.*

Each of the following short biographies is from the Bible; each describes an individual who was able to cope with grief. *Can you personally identify with any of these people? Can you gain hope from any of these individuals' experiences?*

1. Jacob - Genesis 37: 32-35 - Jacob grieved after hearing about the loss of his son Joseph.

➤ *My personal application*

2. David - II Samuel 12: 15 - 18 - David grieved over the sickness and the coming loss of his baby (by Bathsheba) and the loss of all his sons through violent deaths.

➤ *My personal application*

3. Mary, the mother of Jesus - John 19:25-27 - Mary suffered grief while watching Jesus die on the cross.

➤ *My personal application*

4. Ruth - Ruth 1: 4- 18 - Ruth grieved over the death of her husband, brother-in-law, father-in-law, and the departure of her sister-in-law.

➤ *My personal application*

5. *King Uzziah - II King 15: 1 - 5* - King Uzziah grieved over the loss of his health; he was plagued with leprosy.

➤ *My personal application*

6. *Jesus - John 11: 1-16* - Jesus grieved over the death of Lazarus; Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave.

➤ *My personal application*

7. *Job - Book of Job* - Job is a wonderful story of loss and how "God's grace is sufficient to cope."

➤ *My personal application*

Identifying Your Personal Loss

Have you identified the loss or losses in your life that cause you pain? The following questions may help you begin this process. *Answer each of these questions as completely as you can.* As you reflect on your personal losses and grief, allow time to develop a personal solution to help cope with your grief and losses.

1. The losses or grief that you are coping with does not always have to be the loss of an individual. It could be any number of things. Check each of the boxes that relate to a loss you may have suffered in your life.

- ☐ Break-up of a relationship
- ☐ Separation
- ☐ Abortion
- ☐ Still birth or miscarriage
- ☐ Divorce
- ☐ Loss of job
- ☐ Loss of money
- ☐ Notification of terminal illness
- ☐ HIV/AIDS
- ☐ Cancer
- ☐ Change of school or teacher
- ☐ Robbery
- ☐ Child leaving home (empty nest)
- ☐ Relocation to a city away from friends and family
- ☐ Friend or family moving
- ☐ Retirement
- ☐ Loss of the use a physical part of your body (legs, arms, ears, eyes, etc.)
- ☐ Loss of memory (for example, Alzheimer's disease)
- ☐ Loss of _____
- ☐ Cause of a death (which creates a grief issue)
- ☐ Suicide
- ☐ Accident
- ☐ Murder
- ☐ Terrorism

- ☐ War
- ☐ Mystery
- ☐ A missing person (where the body has not yet been located)

2. The loss of _____ gives me the most problems. When I think of _____, I want to use something or someone or find a way to escape the pain and the feelings I'm having.
3. Describe the personal loss in your life including who, what, how, when, where the loss occurred, and your age when you experienced the loss.
4. Did you do everything for the individual or in the situation that you could possibly do prior to the loss or death or the events? Explain.
5. What if anything would you change if you could?

6. How have you personally coped with this loss?
7. Do you most often cope with other kinds of losses (for example, loss of job, a pet, or maybe a wrecked car) the same way you have coped with the loss described in question 6?
8. Every since you have experienced the loss, which of the following feelings have you also personally experienced?
- ☐ Numbness
 - ☐ Sleep problems
 - ☐ Guilt
 - ☐ Longing
 - ☐ Searching
 - ☐ Anger
 - ☐ Sorrow
 - ☐ Despair
 - ☐ Excitation
 - ☐ Helplessness
 - ☐ Panic
 - ☐ Hostility
 - ☐ Resentment
 - ☐ Relief
 - ☐ Anticipation
 - ☐ Hope
 - ☐ Appreciation
 - ☐ Low self-esteem
 - ☐ Stimulation
 - ☐ Yearning (wishing the deceased would come back)

- ☐ Outburst (strong emotions of anger directed either at yourself or others)
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Letting go

9. Look at Appendix A: List of Feeling Words. Identify five feeling words that best describe how you feel today.

Reviewing Past Losses

At times, it is beneficial to compare the loss you are currently grieving with that of previous losses. This can sometimes help you to identify unhealthy methods that you may continue to use in coping with grief issues.

Answer each of the following questions in sequence.

1. The first death I can remember was the death of _____ when I was ____ years old. At the time, I remember experiencing these feelings:

2. The first funeral, wake, or other ritual service I ever attended was for _____. I was _____ years old. The thing I most remember about that experience is:

3. My most recent loss by death was _____ (who?) on _____ (what date?). What were the circumstances?

4. I coped with the loss (listed in number 3 above)
by
5. This loss (listed in number 3 above) was difficult
because
6. Of the important people in my life who are now
living, the most difficult death for me would be the
death of _____. Why?
7. My primary style of coping with loss is
8. I know my own grief is resolved when

Identifying the Five Stages of Grief

There are five basic stages of grief. Each of these stages have some identifiable undertones that can be brought out in an individual in healthy or unhealthy ways all depending upon the relationship the person had with the individual and/or the pet or items that have been lost.⁶

Stage 1: Denial

- Sometimes referred to as *shock*
- Not willing to accept events as they are reported to you
- Numbness often plays a role here!
 - *Define how denial has played a role in your current grief situation.*

⁶ Rando, Theresa A., *Grief Dying, and Death ... Clinical Interventions for Caregivers*, Research Press Company, Champaign, Illinois, 1984, page 27.

Stage 2: Anger

- Anger directed at God for allowing this to happen
- Anger directed at the person for dying
- Anger directed at the people involved for their part
 - *Define how anger has played a role in your current grief situation.*

Stage 3: Bargaining

- Playing the “If” game; "If I had only done this differently"
 - *Define how bargaining has played a role in your current grief situation.*

Stage 4: Depression

- Isolation
- Motivational shut down
- Continuous low
 - *Define how depression has played a role in your current grief situation.*

Stage 5: Acceptance

- Ready to move on.
- Developing skills for coping
 - *Define how acceptance has played a role in your current grief situation.*

The grief process can be different for different age groups. Children will cope differently than teens, and young adults cope differently than seniors.

Where do you personally feel you're at today in the grief process? Explain why.

Developing Skills for Working Through Grief

Communication is possibly the greatest way to cope with grief, especially when we allow ourselves to express our feelings concerning the loss. One of the hardest areas for expressing feelings is to God, due to the non-physical appearance of God. Yet there often remains a feeling of anger towards God for His role in allowing the loss to happen.

At this point, it may be beneficial to write a personal letter to God, expressing your feelings about the loss you have suffered and the grief you feel. The psalmist David wrote his letter this way.

Psalm 13: 1-2 (NKJV)

*How long, O Lord?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
having sorrow in my heart daily?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

In the space below, write your personal letter to God.

What Do I Do Now?

To help individuals work through grief, Worden identifies four steps⁷. These four steps help you begin the healing process over the loss you have faced:

Step 1: *Accept the reality of the loss.*

Step 2: *Experience the feelings of grief, and allow them to find healthy outlets.*

Step 3: *Adjust to the new.*

Step 4: *Reinvest in the new.*

In each of the following four steps, where do you see yourself in terms of your personal efforts to address the issues of grief in your personal life?

1. *Accept the reality of the loss.* Experience its meaning and consequence. This is often the hardest. However, without making progress in this area, your chances of future success are limited.

➤ *What is the reality that I must first accept?*

⁷ Rando, Theresa A., *Grief Dying, and Death ... Clinical Interventions for Caregivers*, Research Press Company, Champaign, Illinois, 1984, page 29.

2. *Experience the feelings of grief, and allow them to find healthy outlets.*

- *Identify several healthy outlets where you can share your grief and begin the process of healing.*

3. *Adjust to the new.* Make healthy changes to your new way of life.

- *What are some of the changes that you can make in your lifestyle that will help you adjust?*

4. *Reinvest in the new.* Begin focusing on new friends and activities, and begin focusing less on the loss (or person who is gone).

➤ *What are some of the things you would like to focus on as you approach this new challenge in life?*

Using Listening Skills

Incorporating listening skills is critical in the grieving process. When you struggle with the loss of someone special, you often can't hear over the pain. As a result, you may miss a key blessing from someone who truly wants to help.

Pastors, counselors, psychologists, and researchers agree upon two conclusions about the grief process:

- *A strong correlation exists between divorce and the grief process.* The correlation appears to be connected with the fact that both spouses are not on the same stage of grief at the same time. Therefore, there is little communication, and when communication does happen, it is often in the form of argument.
- *A great number of arguments occurs between parents (or the survivor spouse) and children, especially adolescent-age children.* Again, the reason appears to be that the parent and child are at different levels of the grieving process.

Each person has to work hard to develop critical listening skills. As you work to develop critical listening skills, always remember the differences between hearing and listening.

1. *Talking* - Your ears won't hear while your mouth is talking. Two senders and one receiver will not result in effective communication. As one person sends the message (that is, *talks*), the other person has to receive the message (that is, *listen*) if communication is to be effective. The sender then becomes the receiver and

the receiver becomes the sender as the individuals switch roles to continue the communication process.

2. ***Getting Ready to Talk*** - You are planning what you are going to say in response to this person, instead of concentrating on "listening."
3. ***Mentally Arguing/Mental Criticism*** - In your mind, you are disagreeing with the speaker and not allowing him/her to explain or communicate. Or, you make a decision based on appearance or poor grammar. You allow personal distractions to interfere with the communication process.
4. ***Preoccupation*** - You are thinking about something else while the other person is talking.
5. ***Impatience*** - You feel annoyed with the slow pace of the individual's speech or his/her inability to get to the point.
6. ***Poor Environment*** - Physical distractions, such as noise, other people, the room temperature (too hot or too cold), or other things can stop you from listening.
7. ***Divided Attention/Failure to See the Speaker*** - Nonverbal communication (for example, facial expressions, body language, and hand motions) interfere with your ability to see the speaker's whole body and to listen to the message.
8. ***Lack of Realization*** - Understanding that listening is a job that takes a significant amount of effort; it doesn't just happen. You have to apply yourself and it is often hard work to listen.
9. ***Immaturity*** - The immature person is not sure of himself/herself so he/she is anxious to become a talker and avoids being a listener. An immature person wants

to tell you what he/she knows instead of listening to learn what you have to contribute.

- 10. *Mental and Physical Fatigue*** - Being mentally or physically exhausted causes an individual to be unable to give another person the attention deserved. If you are mentally or physically fatigued, explain the situation and come back after you are rested and ready to focus on the conversation.

1. List the items you struggle with from the previous list.

2. During this time of loss, have you found it more difficult to listen and in return found communicating with others more difficult? If so, explain.
3. Have you been experiencing arguments with your spouse or children while attempting to cope with your grief? If so, explain.

4. Do you feel that you could improve your communication with others? If so, in what ways?

Other related comments:

Identifying Symptoms of Complicated Grief

The following list identifies potential symptoms of complicated grief. *Review the list and check any that apply in your situation.*

- ☐ You cannot speak of the deceased without experiencing intense and fresh grief.
- ☐ A minor event triggers an intense grief reaction.
- ☐ Themes of loss come up in conversations.
- ☐ You are unwilling to move material possessions belonging to the deceased.
- ☐ Your medical record reveals that you have developed physical symptoms like those the deceased experienced before death.
- ☐ You have made radical changes in your lifestyle following a death, such as excluding yourself from friends, family members, and/or activities previously associated with the deceased.
- ☐ You have a long history of low-grade depression, often earmarked by persistent guilt and lowered self-esteem. If a person experiences a false euphoria subsequent to a death, you may be experiencing unresolved guilt.
- ☐ You have a compulsion to imitate the deceased without knowing why or with no degree of competence for the same behavior. This can include taking on personality characteristics of the deceased.
- ☐ You have self-destructive impulses.
- ☐ You have unaccountable sadness occurring at a certain time each year, at holidays, or anniversaries.
- ☐ You have a phobia about illness or about death.
- ☐ You avoid visiting the gravesite of the deceased.

IMPORTANT: If you checked any of the symptoms in the above list, you should consult with your pastor for a referral or professional counselor or your family doctor to help develop coping skills for grief and to address the issues that trouble you.

Using a Daily Feelings Journal

Make a commitment to yourself to evaluate your feelings on a daily basis. *Begin by answering these five questions each day.* (Note: You may duplicate this page as desired to create your personal journal.)

1. How did you feel when you woke up this morning?
2. Why do you think you felt this way?
3. What feeling did you *want* to experience today?
4. What feeling did you experience today?
5. How are you feeling at this moment?

Appendix A: List of Feeling Words

The List of Feeling Words is by no means a complete list. However, this list can help you to begin the process of identifying personal feelings and be able to verbally acknowledge your feelings to yourself and others.

- ◆ Aggressive
- ◆ Anxious
- ◆ Apologetic
- ◆ Arrogant
- ◆ Bashful
- ◆ Blissful
- ◆ Bored
- ◆ Cautious
- ◆ Confident
- ◆ Curious
- ◆ Determined
- ◆ Disappointed
- ◆ Disbelieving
- ◆ Enraged
- ◆ Envious
- ◆ Exhausted
- ◆ Frightened
- ◆ Frustrated
- ◆ Guilty
- ◆ Happy
- ◆ Horrified
- ◆ Hurt
- ◆ Hysterical
- ◆ Indifferent
- ◆ Interested
- ◆ Jealous
- ◆ Lonely
- ◆ Negative
- ◆ Regretful
- ◆ Relieved
- ◆ Sad
- ◆ Satisfied
- ◆ Surprised
- ◆ Suspicious
- ◆ Undecided

Appendix B:

God's Emergency Phone Numbers

Emergency numbers may be dialed direct with no charge. No operator assistance is necessary. All lines are open to heaven 24 hours a day, 7 days week, and 365 day per year.

- ◆ When in sorrow, call *John 14*.
- ◆ When men fail you, call *Psalms 27*.
- ◆ If you want to be fruitful, call *John 13*.
- ◆ When you have sinned, call *Psalms 51*.
- ◆ When you have worry, call *Matthew 6:19-34*.
- ◆ When you are in danger, call *Psalms 91*.
- ◆ When God seems far away, call *Psalms 139*.
- ◆ When your faith needs stirring, call *Hebrews 11*.
- ◆ When you are lonely and fearful, call *Psalms 23*.
- ◆ When you grow bitter and critical, call *I Corinthians 13*.
- ◆ For Paul's secret to happiness, call *Colossians 3:12-17*.
- ◆ For ideas of Christianity, call *I Corinthians 5:15-19*.
- ◆ When you feel down and out, call *Romans 8:31-39*.
- ◆ When you want peace and rest, call *Matthew 11:25-30*.
- ◆ When your world seems bigger than God, call *Psalms 90*.
- ◆ When you want Christian assurance, call *Romans 8:1-30*.
- ◆ When you leave home for labor or travel, call *Psalms 121*.
- ◆ When your prayers grow narrow or selfish, call *Psalms 67*.
- ◆ For a great invention/opportunity, call *Isaiah 55*.
- ◆ When you want courage for a task, call *Joshua 1*.
- ◆ How to get along with your fellow man, call *Romans 12*.
- ◆ When you think of investments/returns, call *Mark 10*.
- ◆ If you are depressed, call *Psalms 27*.
- ◆ If you're losing confidence in people, call *I Corinthians 13*.
- ◆ If your wallet is empty, call *Psalms 37*.
- ◆ If people seem unkind, call *John 15*.
- ◆ If you are discouraged about your work, call *Psalms 126*.

- ◆ If you find the world growing small and yourself great, call *Psalm 119*.

Appendix C: Seeking Professional Help

The Assemblies of God National Prayer Center - 1-800-4-PRAYER

Lovelines (A 24-hour Christ Centered Crisis Hotline) - 1-612-379-1199

Focus on the Family - 1-800-A-FAMILY

Rapha (A national call center for referrals to Christian counselors) -
1-800-383-HOPE

New Life Clinic (A national call center for referrals to Christian Counselors) - 1-800-NEW-LIFE